



**U.S. Department of Justice
U.S. Attorney's Office
Western District of Texas**

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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**FEDERAL, STATE & LOCAL COOPERATION MARK KICKOFF OF EL PASO
PROJECT SAFE NEIGHBORHOODS INITIATIVE**

United States Attorney Johnny Sutton and District Attorney Jaime Esparza, 34th Judicial District, announced this morning the kickoff of the Project Safe Neighborhoods (PSN) initiative and the indictment of several individuals on PSN related charges.

"Today we are giving notice in El Paso - if you are a felon, drug dealer or an illegal alien you can not possess a firearm - not even a single bullet," stated United States Attorney Johnny Sutton. "We will arrest and prosecute you in either state or federal court."

Today's news conference is another example of how the U.S. Attorney's Office for the Western District of Texas is partnering with state and local law enforcement and carrying out the Department of Justice's gun crime initiative - Project Safe Neighborhoods (PSN). Project Safe Neighborhoods is a nationwide federal initiative designed to reduce gun violence in our communities. PSN promotes partnerships among federal, state, and local law enforcement to target criminals in possession of guns. Federal law insures that when an armed criminal is arrested, that individual will face swift criminal prosecution and be exiled from the community through the use of stiff mandatory prison sentences. The U.S. Attorney's Office has partnered with District Attorney Jaime Esparza as well as local and federal law enforcement to help reduce gun crime in the El Paso community.

"This initiative is a collaborative investigative and prosecution effort between my office and the U.S. Attorney's Office and allows us to more aggressively punish gun crime in our community," stated Jaime Esparza District Attorney 34th Judicial District.

"This enforcement action is an example of the cooperative effort among various agencies to reduce violent crime and make El Paso a safer place to live," stated Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives Assistant Special Agent in Charge Bill Newell.

Some of those indicted by an El Paso federal grand jury yesterday include:

- Tomas Andres Acuna, a fugitive from justice, was indicted for possessing a rifle with an obliterated serial number. He faces a minimum of five years in federal prison upon conviction.

- more -

- Edwin Holland and Wendell McCray were indicted for being felons in possession of firearms in violation of federal law. The defendants were in possession of and attempting to sell a stolen shotgun and rifle. They each face up to ten years in federal prison upon conviction.
- Joel Kline was indicted for being a prohibited person who illegally possessed a firearm. In 1999, Kline was convicted of Assault Family Violence in El Paso County and as a result of that misdemeanor domestic violence conviction, he is prohibited from possessing a firearm. He was also previously convicted of aggravated assault with a deadly weapon. He faces up to ten years in federal prison upon conviction.
- Mario Leal-Solorzano, an illegal immigrant, was arrested near the Fort Hancock Border patrol station where he was found to be illegally in the United States and in possession of a firearm. As an illegal immigrant, he is prohibited from possession a firearm. He faces a minimum five years in federal prison upon conviction.

An indictment is a formal accusation of criminal conduct, not evidence of guilt. The defendants are presumed innocent unless and until convicted through due process of law.

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